

but there's got to be behavioral change in order to justify it.

*Lebanon*

*Ms. Bilbassy Charters.* And can you stabilize Lebanon?

*The President.* I've been trying to—one of the great successes has been to get 30,000 or so Syrian troops out of Lebanon. I think one of the real keys to peace in the Middle East is Lebanon. And Lebanon is a democracy. I've met their President recently here in the Oval Office, which—had a very a good discussion. I've been very impressed by Prime Minister Siniora's courage and boldness. We want to help Lebanon have an armed forces that are effective, so that they can protect their people. And we have been working very hard for 7 years to free Lebanon as much as possible from foreign interference, so that its democracy can grow and mature and be a stable contributor to the region.

*President's Legacy in the Middle East*

*Ms. Bilbassy Charters.* How would you like the people in the Middle East to remember you?

*The President.* I would hope they would remember me as George W. Bush, as a

man who respects their religion, respects human rights and human dignity, and prays for peace.

*Ms. Bilbassy Charters.* Thank you very much. Thank you for your time. Thank you.

NOTE: The interview began taping at 1 p.m. in the Oval Office and continued on the Colonnade and in the Map Room at the White House, for later broadcast. In his remarks, the President referred to King Abdallah bin Abd al-Aziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia; President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad of the Palestinian Authority; Prime Minister Ehud Olmert of Israel; Lt. Gen. Keith W. Dayton, USA, U.S. Security Coordinator for Israel and the Palestinian Authority; Gen. James L. Jones, Jr., USMC (Ret.), Special Envoy for Middle East Security; former Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom, Quartet Representative in the Middle East; former Secretary of State Colin L. Powell; and President Michel Sleiman and Prime Minister Fuad Siniora of Lebanon. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on December 7. A portion of this interview could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

## Remarks at the Children's Holiday Reception

*December 8, 2008*

*The President.* Welcome to the White House.

*Children.* Thank you.

*The President.* Yes. We're excited you are here. And we're excited you're here for a couple of reasons. One, we love to see the wonder in people's eyes when they get to see the majesty of the White House at this time of year. And I'm looking in your eyes, and I'm seeing wonder.

Secondly, I am glad you're here because I wanted to thank your moms and dads

for serving the United States of America. We love being with our military families, because it gives us a chance to express the sincere and deep appreciation of all Americans for the sacrifices that families make. So I want to thank you for standing by your moms and dads and telling them you're proud of them and telling them you love them.

Thirdly, I'm going to ask you to do us a favor, and that is, when you e-mail mom or dad, just tell them you came by the

White House—[laughter]—and the President and Laura, the First Lady, sent a special holiday greeting. So you'll be the messenger. So your job is to say, we respect your mom and dad, we admire your mom and dad, and we pray for your mom and dad. So would you do that for us?

*Children.* Yes.

*The President.* And fourthly, I'm glad to be here because I get to introduce my wife. [Laughter] It's a pretty neat thing, isn't it?

*Children.* Yes.

*The President.* Now, Laura tells me you've already seen Santa—

*Children.* Yes.

*The President.* —had a few cookies—

*Children.* Yes.

*The President.* Yes? I'm surprised there's not more wiggling going on. [Laughter] At any rate, please welcome my dear wife, First Lady Laura Bush.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:01 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady.

## Remarks Following Briefings at the National Counterterrorism Center in McLean, Virginia December 8, 2008

I have just spent a fascinating morning here at the NCTC. The NCTC is a place where our Government gathers threat assess—or threats and intelligence to better protect the American people.

I want to thank both Mikes for taking a strong lead in doing our most important job, which is to motivate people to protect this country, and that's what takes place here.

There's a lot of hard-working Americans who—this—by the way, this center is up 24/7. And any time a piece of data comes in that portends any kind of threat, it's analyzed and, if need be, acted upon.

So most Americans don't know this facility exists. It came to be after the September the 11th attacks, when we all came around and asked the question: How better can we protect the country?

And so I've come by to thank the—all the people who work here, and—because they deserve our thanks. They deserve a Government that understands that the biggest danger we face is from a terrorist at-

tack, and that the best way to defend the country is to stay on the offense and keep the pressure on them constantly and, at the same time, spread freedom as the great alternative to the ideology of those—of the killers.

This is a challenge that's going to face this country for a while. But it's a challenge that can be better met because of facilities like the NCTC and the fact that we've given the professionals the tools, such as listening to the terrorist phone calls, to better protect America.

And so I want to thank you all for your leadership. Appreciate you having me. And again, I thank all the good folks who work here for their dedication.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:23 p.m. at the National Counterterrorism Center. In his remarks, he referred to Director of National Intelligence J. Michael McConnell; and Michael E. Leiter, Acting Director, National Counterterrorism Center.